

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARK'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Great Barr

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103468

Headteacher: Mrs C. Czepiel

Lead inspector: Mr K Williams

Dates of inspection: 5th – 7th July 2004

Inspection number: 257789

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Primary
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	185
School address:	Almond Croft Old Walsall Road Great Barr Birmingham West Midlands
Postcode:	B42 1NU
Telephone number:	0121 3579892
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr A Flanagan
Date of previous inspection:	23 rd March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Mark's is an average size Catholic Primary School situated in the Great Barr area of Birmingham with 186 boys and girls on roll. The pupils join the reception class at the beginning of the year in which they are five. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school varies from year to year, but is generally average. While a few of the pupils currently in Year 6 joined the school after the Reception year, most pupils stay at the school for many years. About three quarters of the pupils are from white British backgrounds; about one in ten is from an Indian background and there are also pupils of Bangladeshi and black heritage. An average proportion of pupils (28) have been identified as having special educational needs, including five with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Ten per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
21074	Keith Williams	Lead inspector	Mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology, physical education
9146	Mark Brennand	Lay inspector	
16892	Julia Elsley	Team inspector	Foundation Stage, science, music, English as an additional language
8867	Becky Russell	Team inspector	English, art and design, geography, history, special educational needs

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides a **good standard of education**. The quality of the leadership, management and teaching are good overall. Across the school, the pupils make good progress and achieve well. In Year 6, standards are average in English, above average in science and well above average in mathematics. Overall, the school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher, supported by the governors and staff, has a very clear vision for the school that is firmly focused on raising standards
- Children in the Foundation Stage make a good start to their education
- Across the school, pupils achieve very well in mathematics
- Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are rising, but they could still be higher
- Teachers ensure that lessons are well organised and interesting and teaching assistants provide very good support
- There are too few opportunities for independent writing in other subjects
- Pupils' work is marked conscientiously, but more could be done to inform the pupils about how well they are doing and what they need to improve
- The school has a positive and caring Christian ethos and all of the pupils, whatever their ability or background, are valued

Overall, the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and continues to provide a good quality of education. By the end of Year 6, standards are higher in mathematics and science, although they are lower in English and mathematics at the end of Year 2. ICT was identified as a weakness in the last inspection. The school has successfully improved the provision and has increased the range of equipment, improved the teachers' planning and their knowledge and confidence in the subject. The issues relating to health and safety have been addressed fully and the school continues to develop its links with business and industry.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
English	B	C	A	C
mathematics	A	C	A	B
science	C	D	B	D

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2.*

Inspection evidence confirms that the pupils' **achievement in good**. The children in the Foundation Stage achieve well and most of the children are well on course to achieve the goals expected of them by the end of Reception in each of the areas of learning. They are likely to exceed those goals in their personal, social and emotional development and a small proportion are likely to exceed the goals for reading, writing and mathematics. In the last set of test results for pupils in Year 2, standards were above average in reading and mathematics and well above average in writing when compared with all schools and with those in similar circumstances. In this year's Year 2, standards are lower because

there are more pupils with special educational needs than is usually found. The pupils are achieving well because they are well taught and standards in English, mathematics and science are average. There is also an unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs amongst the current Year 6, which particularly affects their attainment in writing. As a result, standards in English are lower than those indicated by the 2003 results and they are broadly average. Standards are rising in writing, but there are too few opportunities for the pupils to write independently in other subjects. Standards are above average in science and well above average in mathematics in Year 6. Across the school, the pupils with special educational needs, and those at the early stages of learning English, achieve well.

The pupils' **personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.** They have positive attitudes to school and their behaviour is good. Attendance is good and most pupils are punctual.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education. The teaching is good, overall, and it is very good in Reception, which contributes to the good start made by these children. Across the school, the teaching of mathematics is also very good and results in high standards. The teachers have a very good knowledge of the subjects they teach, they capture the interest of the pupils and manage their behaviour very well. They are very well supported by the teaching assistants. Although work is marked conscientiously, more could be done to inform the pupils about how well they are doing and how they might improve and, in some classes, the over-use of worksheets limits the opportunities for the pupils develop their independent writing.

The school provides a good curriculum and there is a very good range of activities to enrich the curriculum. The care and welfare of pupils are good and they are offered good guidance and support. The school benefits from good links with parents, the community and other schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher has a very clear vision for how the school should develop and improve. Together, the headteacher, staff and governors are committed to raising standards and have created a positive ethos, based on teamwork, in which all of the pupils, whatever their background or needs, are valued and can achieve well. English and mathematics are led and managed very effectively, which contributes to the high standards seen in many classes. The work of the governing body and the management of the school are good. Finances are very well managed and all statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Most parents have positive views of the school. In particular, they indicate that their children like school, behave well and are expected to work hard. They feel that the teaching is good, their children are treated fairly and they appreciate the way in which new children are welcomed. A small number of parents would like more informal contact. While inspectors found that links with parents are good, the school recognises that these views are held by some parents and plans to review the procedures at the beginning and end of the day. The pupils share the view that they are treated fairly and that their teachers help them.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Continue to raise standards in ICT
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to write independently in subjects
- Ensure that the pupils are informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The evidence of the inspection confirms that the pupils' achievement is good overall. Standards in English, mathematics and science are average in Year 2. In Year 6, standards are average in English, above average in science and well above average in mathematics.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children in the Foundation Stage make a good start to their education
- Across the school, the pupils achieve very well in mathematics
- Standards information and communication technology (ICT) are rising but could still be higher
- The pupils with special educational needs and those who are learning English as an additional language achieve well because they receive good support

Commentary

1. The children's attainment when they first join the Reception class covers a broad range, but is average overall. The very good teaching and the broad and balanced curriculum mean that the children make good gains in their learning and are achieving well. Most of the children are well on course to achieve the goals expected of them by the end of Reception in each of the areas of learning. They are likely to exceed those goals in their personal, social and emotional development and a small proportion are likely to exceed the goals for reading, writing and mathematics.
2. The school's results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 2 were above average in reading and mathematics and well above average in writing when compared with all schools and with those in similar circumstances. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 3 was above average in reading and mathematics and it was well above average in writing. The results over recent years have been improving at a similar rate to the national picture.
3. In Years 1 and 2, inspectors found that the pupils' achievement is good overall. However, by the end of Year 2, standards are average in the core subjects, which is lower than those indicated by the previous year's national tests and, in English and mathematics, standards are lower than at the time of the last inspection. This is because there is an unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the current Year 2. The school has worked hard to raise the attainment of this year group; they are well taught and they are working hard to achieve the standards they reach. Inspection evidence indicates that the pupils currently in Year 1 are well on course to attain higher standards when they finish Year 2.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
reading	16.6 (16.1)	15.7 (15.8)
writing	16.7 (15.9)	14.6 (14.4)
mathematics	16.9 (16.3)	16.3 (16.5)

There were 25 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

4. In Year 6, in 2003, the national test results were well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. When compared with similar schools, the results were average in English, above average in mathematics and below average in science. In comparison with those schools having a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, standards were well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. The proportion achieving the higher Level 5 was above average in mathematics and below average in English and science. Over recent years, the results have been improving at a similar rate to the national picture.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	28.3 (27.4)	26.8 (27.0)
Mathematics	29.0 (27.2)	26.8 (26.7)
Science	29.4 (27.6)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 27 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

5. Inspectors found that the pupils in Years 3 to 6 are achieving well. By the end of Year 6, standards are average in English, above average in science and well above average in mathematics. The pupils achieve very well in mathematics because the subject is very well taught. Standards in English are lower than those indicated by the previous year's national test results because there is a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the current Year 6 and this has had a notable impact on the standards being achieved, particularly in writing. The school has focused on raising standards in writing and this is proving largely successful, although more remains to be done to create more opportunities for the pupils to write independently in other subjects. Standards in English among the current Year 6 are lower than at the time of the last inspection and, in mathematics and science, they are higher. Inspection evidence indicates that there is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.
6. The pupils with special educational needs achieve well across the school because they are taught well in lessons and on the occasions when they are withdrawn from class to work with the support staff. The teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of them and they respond well. There is a similar picture with the pupils who are at the early stages of learning English. The individual support given by the staff helps these pupils to make good progress towards their targets. There is a good focus on the introduction of subject specific vocabulary in, for example, mathematics and science.
7. Beyond the core subjects, standards are in line with what is expected of pupils in Years 2 and 6 in physical education and the pupils' achievement is satisfactory. They are above those expectations in history and the pupils achieve well because the teaching is good. At the time of the last inspection, there were weaknesses in the provision for ICT and standards were below average at the end of Year 2 and low by the end of Year 6. The school has worked hard to improve the provision, standards are rising and the pupils are making rapid gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. However, there is still more work to do and standards remain below the expectations for pupils of this age.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Attendance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn
- All achievement is valued and celebrated
- A strong Christian ethos guides the work of the school

Commentary

8. Overall, the rate of attendance is good. The parents are keen for their children to attend and are quick to inform the school when there is an absence. As a consequence, the school spends little time chasing up children who are not attending. Punctuality is satisfactory overall although there are a small number of children who are persistently late.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.6	School data	0.0
National data	5.4	National data	0.4

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

9. The school provides a welcoming, safe and happy environment in which the pupils feel valued and can develop their confidence and self-esteem. From the time they begin school, the pupils work in harmony, share equipment, exchange ideas and learn to care for each other. The children in the Foundation Stage achieve well in their personal development and they soon learn the importance of good behaviour. These youngest children have positive attitudes towards learning and relate well to each other. As they move through the school, the pupils are guided to be generous in their recognition of good work, to applaud the achievements of others and to be justly proud of their own steps in learning. The school works hard to promote the self-esteem of all of the pupils, including those with special educational needs and the few who are learning English as an additional language. Overall, the pupils' behaviour is good and there are many examples of very good and excellent behaviour in lessons and around the school. Although there are a small number of pupils whose behaviour is very challenging, all of the staff are consistent in expecting high standards of behaviour. There have been two lunchtime only exclusions (arrangements which fall outside of exclusion regulation) of one day and three days but no exclusions in the last school year.
10. The pupils' spiritual and moral development is promoted effectively through daily assemblies, well-planned lessons and class discussions. The pupils learn to appreciate the many good things in their own lives and to remember those who are less fortunate in their own community and in the wider world. They are enthusiastic about the 'achievement' assemblies and take great pleasure when they are singled out for praise. It is interesting to note the spontaneity with which pupils recognise the good work of other children and the generosity of their applause. The pupils are happy to discuss work that is displayed on classroom walls and clearly consider it a sign of approval from their teacher. Many moral issues are aired during class discussions and the pupils feel confident to put forward their views, knowing that they will receive a sympathetic hearing. During a geography lesson in Year 4, there was an interesting discussion about the environmental

issues resulting from the destruction of the rain forests of the world. In history, the Year 6 pupils showed great understanding of the horrors facing many people during a time of war.

11. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills and to accept responsibility. In all classes, the teachers expect the pupils to take care of equipment and be responsible for assisting with tidying at the end of lessons. Even the youngest children are given duties to perform, such as taking messages to the school office or to other staff. Older pupils regularly help to look after younger ones in the playground during breaks and they are expected to be aware of, and report on, anyone who looks unhappy or lonely. There are rotas for duties such as helping in the library or assisting staff in assembly. The class and school councils are very important in helping pupils to appreciate that their views will be given serious consideration by the staff and that they have a chance to play an active part in the way the school is run. The adults and children treat each other with respect and courtesy.
12. The pupils' cultural development is good. Through art, drama, religious education and history, they are given experiences that stimulate enjoyment of their own culture and help to develop a growing appreciation of the culture and religions of other world communities. The school is fortunate in having pupils from a variety of ethnic groups and understands what a valuable source of enrichment this brings to the curriculum. Good use is made of visiting artists and drama groups to enhance pupils' cultural awareness. Visits to local museums, galleries and places of worship are arranged whenever it is appropriate to do so.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education. The teaching, learning and curriculum are good and there are good arrangements for securing the care, welfare, health and safety of the pupils. Links with parents, the local community and with other schools are good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good and there are good procedures for assessing the pupils' attainment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching and learning are very good in Reception and, across the school, the teaching of mathematics is a particular strength
- The teachers have a very good knowledge of the subjects they teach, they capture the interest of the pupils and manage their behaviour very well
- Although the pupils' work is marked conscientiously, more could be done to inform the pupils about how well they are doing and what they need to improve
- The teaching assistants make a very important contribution to the pupils' education
- In some classes, and in some subjects, there is an over-reliance on worksheets that limits the opportunities for the pupils develop their independent writing

Commentary

13. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. This has a positive impact on the standards attained by the pupils by the time they leave the school, their achievement and the progress they make. The teaching was good or better in about eight out of ten lessons seen and very good or better in almost a half. Excellent lessons were seen in Years 1 and 5. The unsatisfactory

teaching was due to an over-long introduction and explanation in a mathematics lesson and too little physical activity in a physical education lesson. In both cases, the rate of progress made by most pupils slowed.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 26 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	10	9	3	2	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

14. The teaching in Reception is very good and this enables the children to make a good start to their education. The children's independent learning is very well promoted through enquiry, exploration and discovery. A significant feature is the use of structured play to support the children's reading and writing and the development of subject specific language through the many practical activities. The assessment procedures are very good and the day-to-day observations of the children's progress effectively inform the planning of the next steps in their learning.
15. Across the school, the teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. As a result, they are able to plan and prepare interesting lessons that capture the interest of the pupils. Consequently, most lessons take place in a calm and supportive atmosphere in which the pupils are able to make good progress and achieve well. The teachers are particularly successful in mathematics, where brisk introductory activities set the tone for the lessons and rapid questioning keeps the pupils on their toes. The work is presented in a very lively and interesting way, so that the pupils enjoy the lessons and achieve very well. The teachers' improved knowledge and confidence in ICT is having a positive impact on the rising standards in that subject.
16. The teachers have very high expectations of how the pupil should behave and most pupils rise to this challenge. Occasionally, a small number of pupils, particularly in Years 2 and 6 but also in some of the other classes, present challenging behaviour. The teachers have developed effective strategies to ensure that these pupils remain working and do not disrupt the learning of other pupils. The school's behaviour management policy is implemented consistently, so that the pupils are clear of the consequences of unacceptable behaviour.
17. The teachers' planning takes good account of the differing needs of the pupils, providing a good level of challenge for the more able pupils and support for those who need it. The support staff play a very important role here. They are very well briefed about the activities they will lead and the expected learning that will take place and they ensure that that all of the pupils are able to play a full part in the lessons. All pupils benefit from this support. Those with special educational needs and the pupils who are at the early stages of learning English, in particular, gain in confidence and achieve well.
18. There are good arrangements for assessing the pupils' work and tracking their progress. All subjects are included in the process and the information gained from these assessments is well used to plan the next stage of the pupils' learning. The teachers make judgements on a day-to-day basis, too, and the pupils' work is marked conscientiously. However, there are too few examples of the teachers making comments that help the pupils understand how well they are doing and how they might improve their work. The school has recognised that the marking needs to relate more clearly to the intended learning objective for the piece of work being marked

and has modified its marking policy with this in mind. In some classes, there is an over-use of teacher-devised or photocopiable worksheets. This is evident, particularly, in science and limits the opportunities for the pupils to write for different purposes and make decisions about how they might record their work.

The curriculum

The school provides a good range of curricular opportunities, both inside and outside of lessons. Accommodation and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The children in Reception have a broad range of activities that contributes to their good start
- The planning for ICT provision has improved but is not yet clear about how computers will be used in other subjects
- The provision for the pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language is good
- In most respects, the resources are good but the courtyard space for the youngest children is very small

Commentary

19. The curriculum for the youngest children is planned very carefully to ensure access to all of the areas of learning and takes account of the different ways and rates at which the children learn. Structured play is used well in both the indoor and outdoor settings and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils have the opportunity to use the structured play equipment on the infant playground during lessons and playtime and to use another outdoor area adjoining reception class for the use of bicycles and other wheeled toys. However, the main outdoor provision is in a small uncovered courtyard, which presents difficulties during inclement weather.
20. The curriculum, including the personal, social, health and drug education programmes, utilises the national guidance very well and takes account of the pupils' differing needs. The teachers employ a good range of strategies to ensure that all children, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, receive their full entitlement. The curriculum and the pupils' work in English and mathematics is monitored closely by the headteacher and co-ordinators to establish a consistency from class to class. The staff work well together and use the well-organised resources effectively and efficiently. The topics are delivered in an interesting and stimulating way that motivates the pupils and encourages a thirst for knowledge and an enthusiasm for learning. For example, for historical and geographical artefacts and scientific equipment, such as magnets and magnifying glasses, are well displayed to encourage children to be inquisitive. This contributes to the good ethos in which the children thrive intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally. The children have good opportunities to learn to play a range of musical instruments. This is an improvement in the music curriculum provision.
21. Since the last inspection the school has worked at improving mathematics, writing, science and ICT. They have made very good progress in mathematics. The school recognises that there is still more to do to develop writing in other subjects and to provide more opportunities for the pupils to write at length. For example, in science, more could be done to ensure that the pupils write their findings in greater detail following an experiment. There have been many

improvements in the provision for ICT, although the way that computers are used in other subjects is not yet sufficiently systematic.

22. The school makes good provision for those pupils with special educational needs, an improvement since the last inspection. There are very good procedures for identifying the pupils and their parents are kept fully involved from the moment when concerns are first raised. The school draws up individual education plans (IEPs) for all identified pupils and a good level of support is provided to help them achieve their targets. IEPs are reviewed regularly. The school is to be congratulated on the level of training that has been provided for the teaching assistants, who work so efficiently alongside class teachers to ensure that these pupils participate fully in all class activities.
23. The provision for the pupils whose first language is not English is also good. As a result, these pupils are well supported by their teachers and the teaching assistants. There is no specific co-ordinator for this provision, but the SENCO and the local education authority's pupil support team assess the pupil's individual needs effectively and provide advice on how to accelerate their acquisition, and understanding, of the English language. Small steps and achievable targets are clearly defined and meet the individual needs of these pupils effectively.
24. The extra-curricular provision is good and this extends and supports the curriculum, particularly in art and design, music, history and geography and through residential trips and places of interest, such as the Black Country museum. There are good links with the local church and the wider community, which makes a significant contribution to the pupils' learning. Good relationships exist with other educational establishments, including the local university. Many joint sporting and musical events are held with other schools in the area. There are well established arrangements for the transfer of pupils to the next stage of education.
25. There are sufficient well qualified teachers for the number of pupils on roll. The accommodation is safe and attractive and availability of resources is good and has improved since the last inspection. This is particularly evident in the Foundation Stage, the fiction and non-fiction library and in equipment for ICT.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements for the care, safety and welfare of pupils' are good and the pupils are provided with good advice and guidance. There is good involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective arrangements ensure that pupils learn and play in a healthy and safe environment
- The school council is used well to enable the pupils to air their views
- New pupils are welcomed into the school so that they settle in quickly

Commentary

26. The school is fortunate in having very few concerns relating to Child Protection, but it is not complacent in the way that it addresses them. The headteacher is the designated Child Protection co-ordinator and she has undertaken the necessary training. She has a thorough knowledge of the children in the school and ensures that the necessary steps are taken to monitor those who could possibly cause concern. Records relating to these issues are maintained appropriately. The

school has responded well to the issues raised in the previous inspection. Accidents are now recorded consistently and a foldaway bed has been purchased for provide care for those pupils who may need to rest due to illness or injury. Changing arrangements for the pupils in Years 5 and 6 have been addressed by ensuring that the boys and girls change separate areas. All of the staff are committed to a caring ethos, a view shared by the parents who took part in the consultation. The staff provide very good support, care and guidance for the children.

27. The procedures for seeking the pupils' views are good and enable them to have an influence on how the school is run. The pupils in Year 6 are encouraged to chair and clerk the monthly meetings. Information is fed back via whole school assemblies and all of the children get the opportunity to raise issues through class councils. The school council has had an influence on the respect given to lunchtime supervisors, play equipment has been chosen for break times and they have also organised litter picking and suggested improvements to the cloakroom facilities. The council takes responsibility for monitoring the playground 'buddy system'. As a result of this good work, the school received a Healthy School's award in 2002. There are also informal opportunities for the pupils to express their views to the headteacher.
28. Arrangements for the induction of pupils new to the school are good. The headteacher makes a point of meeting every child prior to the formal half-day induction, which occurs in July. This involves parents leaving their children with the Reception teacher, where they meet the other children who will form part of their class. This time allows the school to make initial judgements on the children's personal development. At the same time the headteacher provides parents with a thorough grounding in its practices and gives advice on ways in which parents can support their children at home. This process was observed during the inspection and the induction of existing pupils is also good. Towards the end of the summer term all pupils have the opportunity to spend an afternoon in their new class. During their time with their new teacher they undertake a number of activities which allows each member of staff to start the process of familiarising themselves with their new pupils.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has established good links with parents, the community and other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school involves parents well in its work, but a few parents, particularly of older pupils, would like more, informal, opportunities to meet with the staff
- The good links with the local community are enhanced by the work of the Friends of St Mark's Association
- The Catholic partnership, local consortium of schools and teacher training links enhance the quality of education

Commentary

29. The school strives successfully to provide a welcoming atmosphere. This was seen to good effect in the way in which it looked after parents at the induction afternoon for children about to join the Reception class, held during the inspection. There is a wide range of opportunities for parents to be involved in the school's work. For example, the parents' attendance at the 'Inspire' workshops in literacy and numeracy was good and, in 2003, the school received an award for this work. The parents also give good support to the 'Reading Together' programme at which parents of Reception age children help with reading. Many parents attend the weekly Mass hosted by the

school, after which they are encouraged to stay for refreshments. Newsletters are a regular means of informing parents about what is happening in school and to this is added the termly curriculum information that is much appreciated by the parents. The school listens to and acts upon parents' views by sending out an annual questionnaire. In response to comments received, the parent teacher consultation meetings have been extended to give parents more time to discuss their children's progress.

30. Despite all this good work, a small number of parents of older pupils feel that there is a lack of contact with the school, in particular with their child's teacher and would like more informal contact with the teachers as they drop off or collect their children. They feel that minor issues could be dealt with quickly, and on the spot, without the need to make an appointment. The school plans to review these procedures.
31. The school relationship with the church is at the heart of its links with the local community. This is enhanced by the Friends of St Marks, who encourage the involvement of the local community by inviting them to a number of the social and fund raising events. For example, the 'Walkathon' uses the park opposite the school and results in considerable sums of money being raised. The Harvest Festival Mass is well supported by the community and donations of harvest food are presented to a local centre for the homeless. Grandparents, neighbours and governors provide good support for the annual senior citizens party. The priest visits the school regularly to celebrate Mass and a religious brother visits classes on a regular basis. Each Saturday, St Mark's is used as a Mass Centre for those senior citizens who have difficulty getting to the local church. There are also regular visits to Sandwell Valley and Hamstead Village is used for studies on the local environment.
32. The school benefits from being a member of two clusters, which allows it to share information, ideas and views. As part of the Birmingham Catholic Primary Partnership, it has been involved in joint staff training days and the Rwanda Project. Links with beacon schools have been used well to develop expertise in ICT and art and design and, through the local consortium of six primary schools, administrative staff have benefited from an exchange of ideas. The school has established very good links with the three Catholic secondary schools to which most of the pupils transfer, to ensure the smooth transfer of pupils into Year 7. Visits begin in Year 5 and the secondary school staff regularly come to meet the pupils and give talks. The school helps those looking to become teachers through a long-standing relationship with Newman College from which it takes two trainee teachers per year. It also provides work experience placements for pupils from local secondary schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership, management and governance of the school are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher has a firm grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and, supported by the staff and governors, has a very clear vision of how it should develop and improve
- Teamwork is a very strong feature, relationships are very positive and the pupils make good progress in this positive ethos
- Finances are very well used to provide education of a good quality

Commentary

33. The headteacher provides good leadership and is well supported by a dedicated staff and effective governing body. She has a very clear vision for the school that focuses on raising standards and ensuring that the pupils of all backgrounds are able to achieve their potential. Areas for development, such as the recent work to improve writing, are tackled with commitment and energy. A strong feature is the way that teamwork is encouraged and promoted. This is particularly evident in the way that teachers and teaching assistants work together closely. For example, in the Foundation Stage, the staff work very well together to promote the provision of the curriculum for the Reception children. The headteacher has formed an effective partnership with members of the temporary senior management team. All of the staff and adults who have day-to-day contact with the pupils reflect the school's aims well, ensuring that they support, and are committed to, maintaining strong working relationships, including all of the pupils in all activities and promoting racial harmony. As a result, the school has a positive Christian ethos in which the pupils, including those with special education needs and the few pupils who are at the early stages of learning English, achieve well.
34. The well organised governors have established good systems for gaining information that helps them plan their activities well. Many governors visit the school regularly, often linked to their own particular interests, and some help in classrooms or at events. There are good links between the governing body and the Friends of St Mark's Association, as four governors are members of the organising committee. The governors have a good understanding of what is going well and they are responsive to the views of parents. They are very supportive of the headteacher and hold the school to account, for example, when evaluating its performance in the National Tests. The governors are particularly effective at supporting the planning and spending of the school's budget through prudent financial management. Spending is closely linked to the priorities of the school improvement plan and governors ensure that the school achieves the best possible value in its purchases. The governors seek to sustain a high level of well qualified staff, whilst maintaining a good level of resources to support the work in classrooms. Expenditure is monitored carefully and day-to-day financial administration is very good.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	569,080
Total expenditure	510,883
Expenditure per pupil	2,647

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	49,066
Balance carried forward to the next	59,631

35. In the temporary absence of the deputy headteacher, during a period of secondment, three staff have joined the headteacher to form a temporary management team. This is working well. All staff share the responsibility for co-ordinating subjects, although there are currently no co-ordinators for art and design and physical education. The co-ordinators for English and mathematics play a very significant part in the high standards found in most year groups. The well organised programme of lesson observations, together with other monitoring activities, ensure that a close check is kept on developments in the subjects and areas of weakness are worked on. Other subjects are co-ordinated conscientiously: teachers are supported in their planning and resources are managed well. Activities, such as the regular scrutiny of the pupils' work, are building up a picture of strengths, weaknesses and standards in the subjects.
36. Other areas of the school's work are well organised. The co-ordinator for the Foundation Stage has a clear understanding of the needs of the youngest children and has made significant improvements since the last inspection. The co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) is enthusiastic, well organised and well informed about the growing needs of the school in this area. She has been instrumental in the securing the improvements seen in the provision. Although there is no specific co-ordinator for the school's provision for pupils learning English as an additional language, the procedures are effective and efficient. The headteacher ensures that the external agencies are involved to support the children on their arrival at the school and give guidance to the staff on supporting the pupils' language development.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

37. The provision for the 16 children in the Reception class is good. The children's attainment on entry to the school fluctuates from year to year, but is broadly average overall. It is below average in communication and language skills. The children make a good start to their school life and make good and, in some cases, very good progress in all of the areas of learning. Most of the children are well on course to achieve the goals expected of them by the end of Reception in each of the areas of learning. They are likely to exceed those goals in their personal, social and emotional development and a small proportion are likely to exceed the goals for reading, writing and mathematics. This is because of the very good quality of teaching from the teacher and teaching assistant.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision in personal, social and emotional development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The children make very good progress and achieve well

Commentary

38. The children's attainment in their personal, social and emotional development is above what is expected of children of this age. This is because the staff take every opportunity to develop this area of learning through the well planned daily routines and the staff are strongly committed to encouraging the children to accept responsibility. These routines provide a good structure, within which the children begin to learn about the world, co-operate and play together well and become increasingly independent. As a result, the children have developed an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the needs and feelings of others and have learnt to establish positive relationships with adults outside their family. A significant feature is the children's ability to listen well to each other and value each other's contributions. They share equipment well and take turns when, for example, in role-play, they queue to see the 'vet'. Their behaviour is good and they show respect for those around them. The sharing time at the end of sessions and the regular 'milk time' reinforce socially acceptable behaviour. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys or girls in all of the areas of learning and this is because of the very good support provided by the staff. Boys and girls tidy away when they have completed an activity before going on to their next task. The children are confident when coming to school. They enjoy learning and work well together and independently. There are opportunities for the children to plan their own work, but they are not extended fully enough to maximise the development of children's independent learning skills. The staff show a very caring and sensitive approach to the children and enjoy very good relationships with their parents.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The provision in communication, language and literacy is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The children make very good gains in their early reading and writing
- Although the children communicate well with each other, and with adults, their speaking skills are not as fully developed as they could be

Commentary

39. A significant proportion of the children started school with below average levels of spoken English. A key strength is the use of imaginative role-play to stimulate and foster talk. The staff have very good questioning skills and they promote discussion with the children very well. They ask challenging, probing questions and the children respond using their newly acquired subject-specific language. However, there is not enough emphasis on supporting and extending the children's spoken English vocabulary and correcting any grammatical errors as they work. The children listen well to instructions and stories.
40. Most of the children make very good progress through the regular literacy sessions and in the many structured play activities. A significant proportion exceed the targets set for them and are now working within the early stages of the National Curriculum. This is a strength of the provision in this area of learning. All of the children enjoy books and reading and there is a strong emphasis on giving them the skills to sound out unfamiliar words. They read confidently aloud, for example when finding information from a non-fiction book. A very good feature is the use of well presented and illustrated reading books made by the staff and children. The children love these books and it is a very worthwhile and rewarding time for staff to see how much they are used and appreciated by the children. Most of the children have begun to read some words or sentences and can recall the story confidently and competently. They can identify the author and main characters, know that a story has a beginning, middle and end and recall what happens, for example, to the Gingerbread Boy. The weekly Family Learning Project, where parents share the 'story sacks' with their children at the end of the day, has a very positive impact on the children's progress and promotes strong links between home and school.
41. In writing, most of the children make very good progress. The children quickly grasp that marks, words and letters convey meaning and there is a good emphasis on handwriting and the formation of letters. By the end of Reception, most of the children can write simple words using correctly formed upper and lower case letters and leaving appropriate spaces between words. All of the children can write their names and can copy accurately. They make good use of the initial sounds in attempting to write unfamiliar words. New work is introduced very carefully and staff members are clear about what the children should learn.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision in mathematical development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The children achieve well
- Very good opportunities to use structured play and song help them gain in confidence

Commentary

42. The children's attainment on entry to Reception is broadly average. They make good progress and, because of the quality of mathematical experiences and the approach to the teaching of mathematics by the staff, a small proportion of the children are exceeding what is expected of

them and are working within the early stages of the National Curriculum. The activities are very well structured and there is a good emphasis on practical activities, so that the children are achieving well. The introductory sessions are well paced and involve all of the children in counting games. Much of this work is done through the excellent use of spontaneous song. The children understand positional language, such as 'first', 'second' and 'third' and they use this in the vet's waiting room, where the receptionist formed a queue for the clients to wait their turn. In the outdoor area, they use other forms of mathematical language such as 'on top of', 'underneath', 'beside' and 'before' with accuracy and confidence as they work with an adult. This makes the learning fun and yet challenges the children's ability to resolve problems. These sessions are brisk and quietly rigorous. Most of the children tackle mathematical tasks competently and with good concentration. There is a good balance between activities led by and adult and those chosen by the children. The children's contributions are highly valued and the staff discuss and assess them very well.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

The provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The children make a good start to their early scientific, geographical and historical learning
- The children use computers well

Commentary

43. The children achieve well because the work is based on first hand experiences and the use of structured role-play supports their understanding. The visit by a guinea pig and the tortoise to stimulate and foster a greater understanding of pets allowed the children to ask questions, observe and find out more about them. For example, they expressed great delight when they discovered that a guinea pig's babies are called 'puppies' and that a tortoise has 'scaly legs and sharp teeth' and can live to be over a 100. They learnt words such as 'hibernation' and observed that the guinea pig moves much faster than the tortoise. The children had a good awareness of personal hygiene and the need to wash hands following their sessions with the animals. The children learn about the life cycle of a butterfly and, stimulated by 'The Hungry Caterpillar' they have produced their own carefully illustrated books. There was no geographical or historical work to be seen during the inspection, but the photographic evidence of previous work shows that the coverage of these areas promotes historical enquiry and geographical skills well. The children have access to the computer with programmes readily set up. They use the mouse, follow instructions on the screen and, with support from an adult, can print out their work, although there was no direct teaching of skills seen during the inspection. The children use small construction equipment purposefully and this engages them in a lot of talk and encourages working together. Larger construction equipment is limited.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The provision in physical development is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The children achieve well and make good progress in their finer movement skills
- The outdoor area is small and this limits the development of larger movement skills

Commentary

44. The children use a good range of apparatus and other equipment with increasing skill they are making good progress. They handle tools, scissors, pencils and small construction equipment well. Malleable materials, such as play-dough, are used safely and with good control. Most of the children enjoy setting themselves challenges and show pleasure in their achievements, for example, when they use the scissors to make junk models. They have high levels of concentration and decision-making during these activities. Although there were no occasions when the children used the larger equipment in the playground or hall, the teacher's planning indicates that the children have suitable opportunities to develop these larger movement skills. The staff use the small courtyard space imaginatively and creatively, but the confined space limits the scope for teaching or practising these skills using, for example, the wheeled toys and climbing apparatus on a regular daily basis. The consequence of this is that the children's overall physical development could be higher by the time they enter Year 1.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The provision in creative development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The staff make very good use of role-play to support the learning
- The children enjoy painting, but the limited range of brushes and paints sometimes limits their independence and creativity

Commentary

45. The staff plan a wide range of activities. There are very good opportunities for role-play and this is a significant strength in developing speaking and listening and establishing firm relationships with the adults who work with the children. The areas set aside for this are well equipped, attractively laid out and they stimulate and promote the children's imaginative play. The activities centre on the children's everyday experiences and there is a good focus on developing specific vocabulary in, for example, mathematics and science. Good links are made with the real world as, for example, the children have learned about the role of a vet and the receptionist. No specific musical activities were seen during the inspection. Most of the children enjoy drawing and painting. However, there is only a limited range of paints available and few brushes of different size which, together with occasional use of templates, sometimes limits the children's independence and creativity. An indication of how much the children enjoy these activities is the way that they burst into song as they work.

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in writing have improved since the last inspection, but there are too few opportunities for the pupils to write independently in other subjects

- The quality of teaching is good
- The pupils with special educational needs are well supported so that they achieve well
- The subject is well led and managed

Commentary

46. The pupils' levels of attainment are broadly average by the end of Years 2 and 6. This is lower than indicated by the National Curriculum test results in 2003 and is due to the significantly higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in these year groups. This has had a notable impact on the standards being achieved in these classes, particularly in writing. While standards are higher in other year groups, inspection evidence indicates that the pupils in all classes are achieving well.
47. Standards in writing have improved steadily since the last inspection. A whole school focus has led to a much wider variety of experiences and purposes for writing being presented to the pupils. Although standards in Years 2 and 6 are lower than those usually found, inspection evidence indicates that standards in writing in other classes are above average. There are many examples in the pupils' books of factual accounts, diaries, lists, persuasive letters, poetry and imaginative stories. Year 1 children were observed learning how to plan and structure their own stories using 'Big Bear, Little Bear' as a model'. The pupils in Year 5 worked very successfully to evaluate the teacher's model of persuasive writing and then write their own examples. The teachers work very hard to extend the pupils' vocabulary and encourage them to use vivid, descriptive language. Poetry is well used as a vehicle to stimulate the imaginative use of metaphors and similes as the Year 6 pupils write about African animals. There are examples, in all classes, of the average and above average pupils writing at length, showing good sentence construction, a growing vocabulary and a sound understanding of how to structure a story. Grammar, spelling and the use of punctuation are taught carefully. Another strong feature of the provision for writing is the way in which the pupils are encouraged to write 'real' books. There are many examples of simply bound, well illustrated stories and poetry around the school. Handwriting is taught throughout the school and many pupils develop a good cursive style. Those pupils with special educational needs are given good support to enable them to reach the targets in their individual education plans.
48. Standards in reading are above average by the end of Years 2 and 6. A love of books is fostered carefully and, through initiatives such as 'Reading Together', parents and carers are given the confidence to become valuable partners with the school in helping their children to acquire sound, basic reading skills. There are regular, daily sessions of guided reading where the pupils, working in groups, share books, discuss them and read to each other or the teacher. The pupils are taught systematically how to sound out letters they routinely use this knowledge to help when tackling new words. Good progress in reading continues throughout the Years 3 to 6 and the pupils begin to choose their own books freely from the library. Many become proficient, silent readers and are able to use their skills in finding relevant information for topics in other subjects. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about their favourite books and demonstrate their preferences for certain authors and particular genres. The teaching assistants are well trained and provide invaluable support in the teaching of reading. They also help the pupils to change their books regularly and assist the teachers in keeping accurate reading records.
49. Speaking and listening skills are developed through all areas of the curriculum and most pupils are confident to contribute to class discussions. Class teachers are very aware of the need to encourage all of the pupils to take part in question and answer sessions and show great skill in directing their questions at the appropriate level for each child. The teachers' questioning

provides challenge as they probe the pupils' recall of their previous learning or, at the end of lessons, assess how well the learning objectives have been achieved.

50. During the inspection, the quality of teaching was good overall. The teachers have a good understanding of the National Literacy Strategy and deliver it confidently. Subject knowledge is good, planning thorough and the teachers set high expectations for behaviour. Very good relationships between children and teachers ensure a pleasant working environment. The curriculum co-ordinator is very well organised, has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject and is fully committed to raising standards even further. The school makes very good use of national intervention programmes (ELS, ALS, FLS) in its bid to improve the attainment of lower ability pupils.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

51. Aspects of language and literacy are used well across the curriculum. The pupils use their speaking and listening skills in the discussions held in all subjects. Reading skills are also well used as they research in books or on the Internet. However, the use of writing is insufficiently developed. Good writing was observed in history or geography lessons in Years 1, 4, 5 and 6, but there is too little evidence of independent writing in other subjects. The heavy reliance on worksheets in some classes limits the opportunities for the pupils to write independently in their own words, and the short sentence or single word answer required in many of these sheets does not always help to extend writing or improve vocabulary. Some of the pupils in Year 6 ably demonstrated their ability to take notes whilst watching a video during a history lesson on World War 2.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high because the teachers expect the pupils to do well and they make the work interesting and challenging
- The subject is very well organised, has a high profile in the school and the pupils enjoy their lessons
- A close check is kept on how well the pupils are progressing
- The marking does not always tell the pupils how well they are doing and how they can improve

Commentary

52. The school's provision for mathematics is one of its key strengths. Standards are rising because the school has raised the profile of the subject and the teachers make lessons interesting and enjoyable. As a result the pupils have very positive attitudes to mathematics and they achieve very well. The introduction of teaching groups containing pupils of similar ability is having a significant impact because it enables the teachers to plan work that takes close account of the pupils' needs. By the end of Year 2, standards are average which, although lower than that indicated by the school's National Curriculum test results for seven year olds in 2003, is due to an unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs in this year group. These pupils are well taught, however, and they work hard to achieve the standards they reach. Although there is also a large proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the current Year 6, inspection evidence indicates that standards are higher, because virtually all of the pupils

reach the expected levels and a good proportion reach the higher Level 5. Mathematics is very well led and managed by the co-ordinator, supported by the headteacher and a committed staff.

53. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. The teachers have a good understanding of the National Numeracy Strategy and there is a consistent approach from class to class. Lessons usually follow the format of the national guidelines, but the teachers modify them to take account of the work being covered and the pupils' understanding. The pupils' attention is captured by brisk introductory activities, often related to the work of previous lessons, and there is a strong emphasis on developing the pupils' mental skills. Rapid questioning keeps the pupils on their toes and ensures that they are all involved. This was seen to good effect in Year 4, when the pupils were expected to calculate a half or a quarter of a range of standard measures. These pupils have a very well developed understanding of the relationship between multiplication and division and they use terms such as 'inverse' very confidently. The pupils built on these skills during the lively opening to an excellent lesson in Year 5, where they followed the teacher's rapid instructions for calculations that included square roots. Across the school, the pupils become increasingly confident and competent in mental calculation and they use these skills well to benefit other work.
54. The teachers plan a wide range of interesting activities, which are presented in a very lively way. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, the teacher used a smartboard¹ to show the class how to create a block graph. This captured the pupils' attention and ensured that they understood what to do when they created their own graphs, using data that they had collected in a previous lesson. This reference to the work previously covered is a regular feature of the lessons, which helps the pupils' understanding of the purpose of what they are learning. The teachers often relate the work to real-life situations as, for example, when the Year 1 pupils estimated and predicted which containers will hold 'more', 'less' or 'about' a litre, and when those in Year 3 learned about analogue and digital times. The planning takes good account of the pupils' different needs and the teaching assistants are very well used to provide support. This benefits all of the pupils, but most particularly those with special educational needs. As a result, they make very good progress towards their particular targets and they achieve very well. The teachers have high expectations of the more able pupils, who are provided with the harder work that challenges and stimulates them. When very occasionally, as in a Year 6 lesson, the teacher's explanation and introduction of a topic is too long, this slows the pupils' rate of progress.
55. Good procedures assess and track the pupils' progress. The teachers have good questioning skills, which they use to assess the pupils' understanding, and they provide many opportunities for the pupils to explain the strategies they use. As a result, the teachers are able to keep an eye on the progress of individual pupils on a day-to-day basis. The pupils' work is marked conscientiously and, in the best examples, the pupils are well informed about how well they are doing and how they should improve their work. This is not consistent from class to class, however, and the school has recognised the need to focus the marking more closely on what the pupils were expected to learn in the lesson and has recently modified its marking policy to this effect.

Mathematics across the curriculum

56. There are good opportunities for the pupils to use mathematics in other subjects. This has a positive impact on the pupils' achievement in mathematics and in their understanding of the work covered in those subjects. There are many examples of the pupils using their estimation

¹ This is an interactive white board that is linked to a computer-controlled projector. A large image is projected and the teacher, or pupil, is able to control the screen in much the same way as they would with a mouse.

and measuring skills in design and technology and collecting and interpreting data in science. Computer generated art packages are used regularly, for example to create symmetrical patterns in Year 1. The pupils in Year 2 also used computers to create block graphs to show the incidence of the pupils' birthdays. The pupils in Year 4 used their knowledge of angles to guide a turtle on the computer screen. In geography, the pupils in Year 6 have created more sophisticated graphs to show methods of transport in Kenya.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average by the end of Year 6
- All pupils are achieving well and are acquiring a good scientific knowledge vocabulary
- The school has made good progress in developing the pupil's investigative skills since the last inspection but the way they record their findings could be improved

Commentary

57. The provision for science has improved since the last inspection and standards have risen. The teacher assessments made at the end of Year 2 in 2003 were well above the national average and an above average proportion of pupils reached the higher Level 3. No lessons were seen in science for the current Year 2, but an examination of the work over the course of this year indicates that standards are not as high as in 2003. This is because the cohort has a higher percentage of pupils with special educational needs. However, it is clear that the pupils are reaching average standards, are achieving well and making good progress over time. The results of the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 for 2003 were above average. Although no lessons were observed in Year 6, the evidence from discussions with the pupils and from their previous work confirms that standards are above average. These pupils, in particular, have benefited from an approach that focuses well on developing their practical and investigational skills. Over time, the pupils are making good gains in their learning and are achieving well.
58. Only two lessons were seen. In a Year 1 lesson, the teacher presented a well-planned and resourced activity that enabled the pupils to carry out a fair test on growing seeds. The trays of seeds had previously been put into dark and light places and the pupils had predicted fairly accurately the outcome of growing the seeds in the contrasting conditions. The pupils were enthusiastic and well motivated by the experiment and, when the teacher showed them the results, they were able to draw conclusions about what had happened in a very perceptive way. This practical approach promotes enquiry, exploration and discovery effectively. It is particularly good for those pupils who are learning English as an additional language, helping them, for example, to acquire the correct scientific vocabulary. As a result the pupils could not wait to find out what their next investigation was going to be as they noticed two identical plants on their tables. The excellent teaching from the teacher and the well informed teaching assistants together with the skilful organisation of the lesson sustained the pupils' interest and involvement. Consequently, these pupils were achieving well. In the Year 3 lesson, the pupils had a clear understanding of the processes of fair testing and they all responded with enthusiasm to the work on shadows. The on-going test during the day caused great excitement as they followed and recorded the changes in the length of shadow on the hour. The teacher managed the practical activities well. All of the pupils participated fully and the teacher created challenging tasks which ensured that the pupils achieved well and made good progress, learning that the shadow

changes as the day progresses. A significant feature of both lessons was the way in which the teachers encourage the pupils to co-operate with each other and the willingness of the pupils to work hard and help each other.

59. The evidence of the pupils' work shows that the pupils have a consistent, broad and well-balanced coverage of the science curriculum. A significant feature since the last inspection has been the improvement of the pupils' scientific knowledge and vocabulary. This has been very successful and through discussion with the pupils in Year 6, for example, it is evident that they can use the vocabulary well to explain their work on electricity and forces. While they can recall their findings, they are not so confident in explaining their concluding thoughts on the experiments. In some classes, there are too many instances of the pupils copying text and an over reliance on work sheets. The teachers do not always provide opportunities for the pupils to record their work independently and, sometimes, there is insufficient time given to writing up the findings. The teachers mark the pupils' work regularly and make comments to let them know how well they have done the activity, but these comments are not always followed through and do not always reinforce fundamental literacy skills with sufficient rigour. The school has good assessment arrangements for science. The teachers record the details of the pupils' achievements when they have completed a piece of work and there are plans to introduce science targets for individual pupils.
60. Despite difficulties caused by unavoidable staff absences, the leadership and management of science are satisfactory and, under the new co-ordinator, the situation is improving. The co-ordinator has a clear vision and a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject and is now in a good position to move the subject forward in order to accelerate the rate of progress and the pupils' achievements.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising, but they are still below what is expected
- The subject is well led and managed by the co-ordinator
- The teachers' knowledge and confidence in the subject and the range of activities offered have improved, although there is still more work to be done
- The use of computers in other subjects is not yet planned systematically

Commentary

61. Under the good leadership of the subject co-ordinator, a range of strategies has been implemented successfully and the provision for ICT has improved since the last inspection. Good progress has been made and standards are rising, but the school recognises that more work still remains to be done and standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are still below what is expected of pupils of this age.
62. The teaching was good in the one dedicated ICT lesson seen, in Year 4, when the pupils learned to give instruction to a 'turtle' on their computer screens. The pupils had previously carried out similar tasks when they programmed a floor robot in Year 2 and this lesson built well on their knowledge and understanding. The pupils made good use of their knowledge of angles and they confidently took part in the discussion, which was well managed by the teacher. The lesson was

hampered by the pupils having to view the teacher's demonstration on a small screen and, although they remained interested, attentive and very well behaved, there were few opportunities for them to directly operate the computer. This limited the pupils' achievement which, although satisfactory, could have been better.

63. The subject co-ordinator took on the role at the beginning of the school year and, with the support of the headteacher and staff, has had a significant impact on the improvements seen. The curriculum now covers the necessary areas. The school has invested in purchasing more computers for each class and, although from time to time technical difficulties have limited their use in some classrooms, they are generally well used. The pupils are making rapid progress in learning the skills they need and the use computers is beginning to form a regular part of lessons in other subjects. The teachers' knowledge of ICT, and their confidence in teaching it, has improved, largely through school-based training and support, and the improvement in provision is having a positive impact on the standards attained by the pupils and their achievement. The school has identified the need to improve the direct teaching of ICT and has introduced two smartboards for use in ICT lessons and those in other subjects. Although these are a fairly new acquisition, they are already having a positive impact on the pupils' understanding and levels of interest and teachers and the pupils used them effectively on a number of occasions during the inspection. The school is currently exploring the funding of a set of laptop computers to enhance the direct teaching of skills and to raise standards. This is an important way forward for the development of the subject.
64. Standards are rising, but there is much catching up to do and the school recognises that standards are still lower than they should be. For example, in order to cover any gaps in the pupils' expertise, those in Year 6 spend a large proportion of their time covering the programmes of study designed for Year 5. While this is appropriate in the short term, it is important that the pupils quickly gain access to the activities designed for their year group so that, for example, they can take part in multi-media presentations. The school also plans to review its approach to assessing the pupils' work to improve the tracking of pupils as they move from class to class.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

65. The school has rightly identified the need to improve the way the ICT is used in other subjects and is developing its range of software to enable this to happen. There are examples of computers being used in subjects such as science, art and design and geography, but this is not yet planned systematically. As a result, it is not always clear when computers will be used, so opportunities are sometimes missed.

HUMANITIES

66. During the inspection, it was only possible to observe one lesson in **geography**. The evidence from this lesson, the teachers' planning and the work on display around the school indicates that the subject has an important place in the curriculum. In an interesting lesson in Year 4, the pupils showed a high level of interest in other parts of the world as they worked, with great absorption, on their research about the rain forests of Brazil. The discussion at the end of the lesson provided an insight into the depth of their understanding of the way in which the people of this area adapt to the environment in which they live. A project on India is enhanced by the knowledge and expertise of some of the parents of Indian families in the school, who are able to provide first-hand information about the culture and customs of their country. Wherever possible, links are established between history and geography. Work on the early settlers such as the Romans and the Vikings provide a rich source of geographical material. There are good links

with art, for example, in the vivid paintings of a Kenyan sunset in Year 6 and the paintings of the dripping green rain forests of Brazil in Year 4. Resources for teaching geography are very good.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils achieve well and they attain standards above those expected
- The teaching is good, but there is an over-reliance on worksheets in some classes, which limits the pupils' opportunities to present their own ideas in their own words

Commentary

67. It was only possible to observe lesson in Years 1 and 6. The evidence from these lessons, the pupils' work in their books and on display around the school indicates that the pupils achieve well and, by the end of Years 2 and 6, standards are above the expectations of pupils this age. The subject is planned carefully so that each year group, at an appropriate level, covers different topics.
68. The pupils in Year 1 demonstrated that they have a good understanding of the similarities and differences between times past and present as they compared seaside holidays now with those in the 1900's. They were presented with video and photographic evidence and they used these sources well to support their ideas. In the lesson observed in Year 6, the pupils again watched a video telling the story of Thea Gersten, a Jewish refugee during World War 2. Most of the pupils confidently made notes during the programme and then joined in a lively discussion about the way in which children were affected by the events of the war. The pupils participated in historical enquiry by studying text and pictorial evidence and they made sensible comments about the feelings of the people involved in these past events. The level of interest of pupils in both these lessons was very high and the learning was very good. This high level of interest was directly attributable to the very good quality of the teaching. In both lessons, the teachers led the discussions well, demonstrated good subject knowledge and set a very good pace throughout.
69. Throughout the school, the work in the pupils' books shows many interesting topics being covered including the life of Florence Nightingale, Roman Britain and the Vikings. Some work is beautifully presented and good use is made of written English to record the pupils' ideas and research. However, the standard is inconsistent and the over-use of unchallenging worksheets mars the tidiness of some books and reduces the opportunities for the pupils to practice their writing independently. Resources are very good.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

70. Although there were no lessons observed in **art and design** during the inspection, it is clear from the work on display around the school, and the wealth of illustrations in the pupils' books, that the subject is a regular feature on the school timetable and an important link with other subjects. The school hall is enlivened with many colourful collages, including the wedding feast at Cana, the story of Zacchaeus and the Parable of the Sower, which are produced as part of religious education lessons. The pupils experience a wide variety of media from painting in gouache and watercolour to white on black chalk drawings and fine-line, pencil drawings of bowls of fruit.

All of the work is well mounted, carefully displayed and a source of pride to the young artists who produce it. Resources for teaching art are very good.

71. No lessons in **design and technology** were observed, so it is not possible to make overall judgements about the provision. The teachers' planning and discussions with staff and pupils indicate that the subject is well planned and covers the requirements of the National Curriculum. There are many examples of good quality pupils' work on display around the school and the quality of presentation shows that they take great pride in their efforts. As the pupils move through the school, the opportunities include designing and making model homes, puppets, working lighthouses, moving toys using cam mechanisms and powered vehicles. The work becomes increasingly more sophisticated from class to class and there is a strong emphasis on the pupils evaluating their products thoughtfully.
72. No **music** lessons were observed during the inspection so no judgements can be made about the pupils' levels of attainment and their achievement. The planned provision follows the national guidance. The school has recognised the need to monitor the music provision in each class and to provide opportunities for the co-ordinator to support and work alongside colleagues. At present there are too few opportunities to check that the pupils are acquiring the appropriate skills and techniques and are making steady progress as they move through the school. There is good provision for individual music tuition and opportunities for enrichment through listening to 'live' music at the beginning of assemblies and working with visiting musicians. In singing practice, the pupils sing clearly and tunefully and they keep a steady rhythm. The pupils who are learning to play an instrument have a competent grasp of the basic rudiments of music and good control and mastery of their instrument. They are keen, enthusiastic, making good gains in their learning and are achieving well because of the good quality teaching by the specialist teacher.

Physical education

Provision in physical education (PE) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils experience a broad range of activities, in and out of lessons
- In the absence of the subject co-ordinator, staff have shared responsibility for the subject, but there is no clear overview of standards and progress

Commentary

73. It was only possible to observe two PE lessons during the inspection. The evidence of these lessons, in Years 2 and 4, the teachers' planning and discussions with the pupils indicates that standards are in line with what is expected of pupils. The pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. The programme is planned to cover the requirements of the National Curriculum and effective use is made of local coaches to provide expertise in, for example, football. Some of the activities are offered outside of the regular PE lessons and they provide good opportunities for the pupils to extend their skills, try out a wider range of sports than might otherwise be possible and develop links with the local community. The school has recently received an 'Award for All' in recognition of its sporting contribution. In the absence of the subject co-ordinator, the staff have shared responsibility for the smooth running of the subject. While this has been satisfactory and has ensured that the PE programme has continued in each class, it has meant that there is no clear overview of the standards being attained and how the work develops from year to year.

74. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. In a Year 2 dance lesson, the pupils used bold and simple movement patterns to ‘catch raindrops’, changing direction smoothly to move between the ‘puddles’. They responded well to the recorded broadcast used to provide structure for the lesson, although the proximity of the lesson to the end of the day meant that many of the pupils were tired and were unable to sustain controlled movement for long. The teacher’s intervention enhanced the pupils’ understanding and enabled the pupils, overall, to make the most of their opportunities. The lesson seen in Year 4 was less successful because there was too little time for the pupils to take part in rigorous physical activity and their learning was limited.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

The provision in personal, social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The work covered has a significant impact on the pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Commentary

75. The programmes of work for promoting the pupils’ personal, social and health education and increasing their awareness of citizenship are well developed, carefully planned and integrated within broader topics. The effectiveness of these programmes is evident in the pupils’ positive attitudes and the respect they show for other pupils, the staff and visitors to the school. The weekly sessions held in each class are well used to discuss important issues and provide a platform for the pupils to express their views and explore their feelings. For example, the pupils in Year 5 were observed discussing what it feels like to be ‘left out’. They showed a good understanding of the social and moral issues and were confident in offering their views and opinions. The teacher sensitively encouraged the pupils to share their thoughts and feelings and they were caring and thoughtful when listening to other pupils. There is a good focus on ensuring that the pupils have a regard for the wider community and there are many opportunities for the pupils to be involved in the church, to take part in visits into the community and to support national and international charity events.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	3
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).